

Libraries Ready for Readers

Community librarians learn the ins and outs of managing a library.



Government officials and community members look on as children explore new books at the library launching.

In Rwanda, more and more government agencies, donors, and development partners are promoting the development of a reading culture. Towards this end, efforts to improve access to recreational reading materials are increasing. In the past year, USAID has distributed 17 library collections as part of the Community Mobile Library Initiative, and communities eagerly received them. "It can expand how we see the world," said Gatore Fidele, a community member in Kayonza district, the site of a new library.

However, without proper management of these materials, their intended impact may not be realized. Without a skilled librarian, borrowed books may never be returned, and readers may struggle to find books of interest to them, while other community members may not realize that the library is there for their use or know about it at all. It is not enough to have reading materials in communities; library books must be promoted, managed, and maintained.

This is why USAID partnered with Rwanda Library Services to train 55 community librarians, 22 of whom have received books from USAID. At the training, librarians learned the importance of cataloguing their library books to know how many and which books they have. When community members borrow books, they will know where the books are and when to expect them back, preventing losses.

Equally important is organizing books according to genre and subject. Many of the communities hosting a library from USAID previously had very little or no access to such reading materials, and, consequentially, a culture of reading was lacking. To build and enhance this culture, community members need books which interest and excite them.

Librarians learned how to classify books and to organize shelves accordingly. "It makes it easier for readers to choose a book of their choice," said Maurice Ndayishimiye, a librarian from Kajongo sector, Nyamasheke.

Another part of the job of the librarian, trainees learned, is to encourage community members and to help them understand that the library is for everyone. Parents, in particular, should be encouraged to bring their children. "Bringing young people to the library does not only help the young child—it helps that one adult also. It helps everybody," said Fidele.

Following the training, librarians returned to their districts, ready to better manage and promote their libraries. In Kajongo sector, Maurice went straight to work. He organized a launching event, when over 800 new titles from USAID were added to his library's collection. National and district level government officials as well as students and community members attended. Students received books as prizes for participation in a reading competition, and other children and community members performed a play about the importance of parents promoting education and literacy for their children.

In the hands of librarians equipped with essential skills, community libraries are sure to thrive in the communities eager to receive them.